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The substance of the following essay was originally prepared for the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, and was read before the Society on Monday evening, Oct. 8, 1877. The introduction was written at a later period for the Atlantic Monthly. The essay is now sent ~~to the members of the Society~~ with the author's compliments.

Marshal Grouchy published or printed, in Philadelphia, two pamphlets, which are in the Library of the Pennsylvania Historical Society in Philadelphia. The writer of this essay has not been able to find them elsewhere, and he would be greatly obliged to any one who would put him in the way of adding them to his collection of works on the Campaign of Waterloo. Their titles are given below.

JOHN C. ROPES.

53 Temple Street,
BOSTON, MASS., 16 May, 1881.

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1. Observations sur la Relation de la Campagne de 1815 publiée par le Général Gourgaud, et Réfutation de quelquesunes des assertions d'autres écrits relatifs à la Bataille de Waterloo. Par le Maréchal de Grouchy, Philadelphie. De l'imprimerie de J. F. Hurtel, No. 124, 2me Rue Sud, 1818.

2. Doutes sur l'Authenticité des Mémoires Historiques attribués à Napoléon, et première Réfutation de quelquesunes des assertions qu'ils renferment. Par le Comte de Grouchy, Philadelphie. Imprimé par J. F. Hurtel, No. 126, Second Rue Sud, Avril, 1820.

WHO LOST WATERLOO?

THE interest so generally revived in the life of Napoleon the First, awakened by the publication of the Memoirs of Madame de Rémusat and of Prince Metternich, might be a sufficient apology for a discussion of the subject named at the head of this article. But when it is remembered that the campaign of Waterloo has been studied anew since the advent of the second empire; that it has been thoroughly investigated by those whose aim was not strictly a historical aim, but a partisan aim, who endeavored by the conclusions at which they arrived either to support or to destroy the prestige of the first Napoleon, it may well be admitted to be capable of receiving a more impartial treatment than it has yet obtained, now that political affairs have taken such a turn in France that, for the moment at least, the prestige of the great emperor is not a material factor in public opinion. Add to this that the complete, the overwhelming defeat suffered at Waterloo by such a master of the art of war as Napoleon confessedly was must always awaken curiosity and surprise. It was a total failure, suffered by a man whose genius for war has never been surpassed, and whose experience in war has probably never been equaled. The world is never tired of asking, How did it come about that such a man met such a crushing disaster, such a Waterloo defeat?

Now it is not the object of the present pages to answer this question fully. I have room to deal with only one of the subjects suggested by that question. But this is perhaps the most important one of all: it relates to the failure of Marshal Grouchy, commanding the right wing of the army, either to prevent the Prussians from joining the English, or to join, himself, the main army under the emperor. It will generally be admitted that Napoleon had a force sufficient to defeat the motley army under the Duke of Wellington, had Grouchy prevented the Prussians from uniting with it. He would have been able to use against it the 16,000 men with which he kept the Prussians at bay all the afternoon. It may fairly be contended that if the two corps under Grouchy had reinforced the main army they would at least have averted the rout of the French army, even if the Prussians had joined the English. But Grouchy neither prevented the union of the allies, nor did he join his master. Wellington and Blücher effected an unopposed junction of their forces, and overwhelmed the unassisted army of Napoleon. Grouchy, in fact, was, at the critical moment, some seven or eight miles off, on the other side of the Prussians.

Naturally enough, a controversy arose out of this state of things. It has lasted down to our time, and cannot yet be said to be closed. The emperor and his friends have laid the blame of the loss of the battle upon Grouchy; the marshal and his friends have maintained that he obeyed faithfully the orders of the emperor. Grouchy's cause has been taken up by those French historians who, like Charras and Quinet, wrote during the second empire with a view of exploding what they termed "*la légende napoléonienne;*" and also by Colonel Chesney in his able Waterloo Lectures, General Shaw-Kennedy, and others. Napoleon's side of the question has been maintained not only by Thiers, but by several other writers, of more authority, though of less repute. The whole matter has been treated with a great deal too much of heat and partisan feeling. It is possible, I think, to arrive at a more correct conclusion than any to be found

in the books, and I trust that the discussion may prove not uninteresting.

What, then, are the facts in regard to this celebrated controversy?

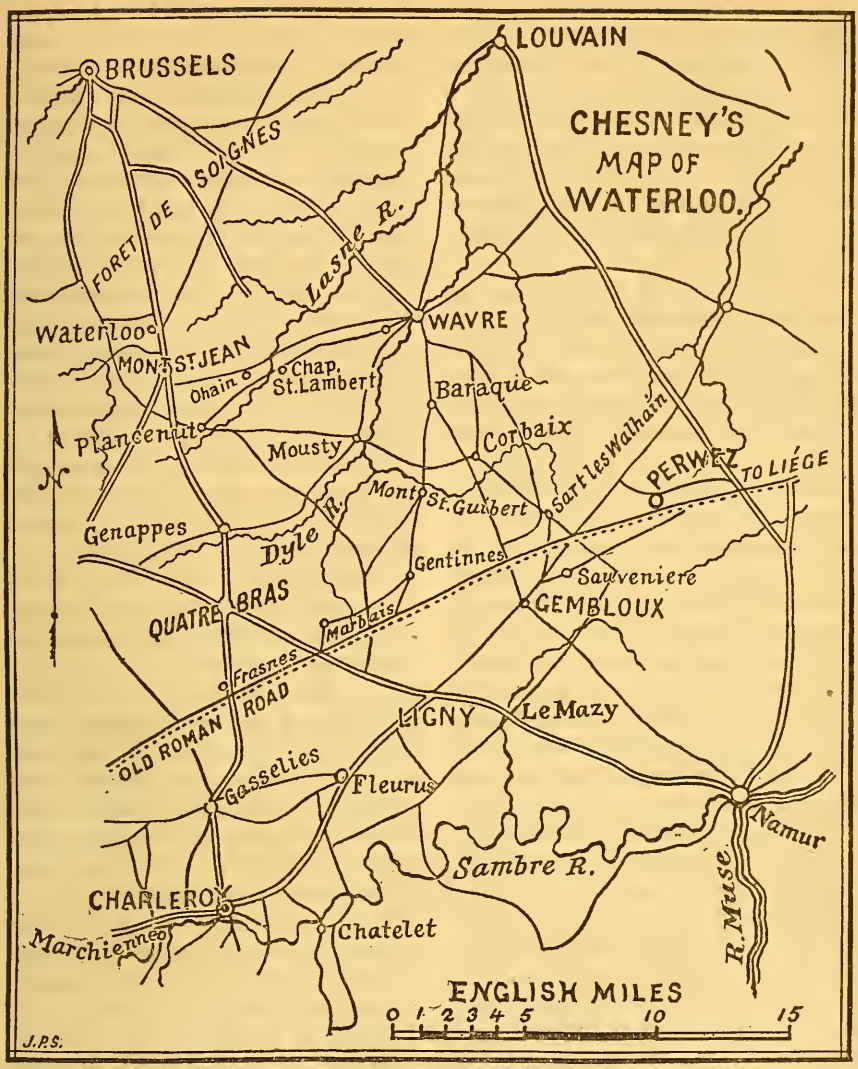
The emperor invaded Belgium on June 15, 1815. He divided his army into three portions: intrusting to Ney the left wing, consisting of the first and second corps, to Grouchy the right wing, consisting of the third and fourth corps, and retaining the sixth corps and the guard under his own immediate control. Orders, which it is not necessary to quote here, were issued on the morning of the 16th, the day on which were fought the battles of Ligny and Quatre Bras, giving to each of these marshals the charge of these wings of the army.

Napoleon's object in the campaign was to separate the allied armies, and beat them in detail. Their cantonments extended over a hundred miles of ground from east to west, and forty from north to south; and, speaking generally, the English were to the westward and the Prussians to the eastward of the great turnpike which runs north from Charleroi to Brussels. There was a fine road running from Namur northwest to Nivelles and Braine-le-Comte, which crossed the turnpike at Quatre Bras. The English base of operations was the sea, — say, at Ostend and Antwerp; the Prussian on the Lower Rhine, in the direction of Namur and Liége.

Having, on the 16th, beaten the Prussians at Ligny, and, by the action fought by Ney at Quatre Bras, prevented the English from joining them, the emperor had so far succeeded. He thought it probable that the Prussians would retreat on their base; that is, towards Namur or Liége. The capture at five in the morning of the 17th of some cannon and prisoners near Le Mazy, on the Namur road, by General Pajol, of the cavalry, confirmed this view. Now the emperor's plan was to move at once against the English in the direction of Brussels, and it would not do to allow the Prussian army, at or near Namur, to reorganize and attack his communications. Therefore, although by no means certain that the Prussians had fallen back in this direction, he deemed it wise to send his whole right wing in pursuit of them, and push them vigorously. We can hardly suppose that if he had thought it more likely that the Prussians would retreat to the north and unite with the English, he would have thus divided his army. There would have been no reason for such a course. If, however, the Prussians should retire to the eastward, and seek to rally and return upon the French communications, while the emperor was manœuvring or fighting near Brussels, the 34,000 men under Marshal Grouchy would be none too many, and yet might be enough to answer the purpose of delay. At the same time, it was certainly possible that Blücher might not retreat in the direction of his base, and so separate himself from the English, but might, on the contrary, seek to join Wellington, and try the fate of another battle. And of this possibility it was of course necessary to warn Marshal Grouchy, so that he might, in this event, operate so as to keep the Prussians separated from the English.

That the defeated Prussians should have been pushed the night of the battle, and the direction of their retreat ascertained, no one can deny. Some writers lay blame on Grouchy for this oversight; but to my mind the emperor and Soult, his chief of staff, are much more to be blamed. No one went out in search of the enemy but Pajol, with two regiments; and whether he was sent, or went of his own motion, does not clearly appear.

The next morning, also, the 17th, the emperor wasted, undoubtedly, a great deal of time. However, near noon, Napoleon gave Grouchy a verbal order to take his two corps (the third and fourth) of Generals Vandamme and Gérard, and the cavalry of Generals Pajol and Exel-



mans, and put himself in pursuit of Marshal Blücher. And here it is important to ascertain what Grouchy's orders actually were. Grouchy himself made, in 1819, the following statement:[1] —

"I told him [Napoleon]," says Grouchy (page 12), "that the Prussians had commenced their retreat the evening before, at ten o'clock," and so forth. "These observations," he goes on to state, "were not well received. He repeated to me the order which he had given me, adding that it was for me to discover the route taken by Marshal Blücher; that he was going to fight the English; that I ought to complete the defeat of the Prussians in attacking them as soon as I should have joined them; and that I should correspond with him by the paved road which leads from a point

[1] Observations sur la Relation de la Campagne de 1815, publiée par le Général Gourgaud; et Réfutation de Quelques-unes des Assertions d'Autres écrits relatifs à la Bataille de Waterloo. Par le Comte de Grouchy. A Paris. 1819.

near where we were to Quatre Bras.[1] Some moments of conversation which I had with the chief of staff [Soult] regarded only the detaching of certain of my troops which were to be sent to Quatre Bras. Such are," Marshal Grouchy solemnly states, "word for word," the only dispositions which were communicated to me, the only orders which I received."

To the same effect, he says further on (page 30), "But why, says the author of the work which I am criticising [Gourgaud], — why does not Marshal Grouchy publish the text of the orders which he has received? The reason is simple. It is because they were transmitted verbally only. Those who have served under Napoleon know how rarely he gives them in writing; and at the moment when he commenced to perceive the loss of precious time, on the morning of the 17th, less than ever did he think of putting his instructions in writing. It is convenient, I know," the marshal adds, "to be able to attribute to the non-comprehension of verbal orders false movements which have been the result of their faithful execution," etc.

And again, page 31: "Besides, if it was of real importance to show that they (my orders) were only verbal, I could find, if not a proof, at least a strong indication of it in Marshal Soult's letter, . . . in which, speaking of my march to Sarravalain [Sart-à-Walhain] he expresses himself in these terms: 'This movement is conformed to the dispositions which have been communicated to you.' He would not have failed to say, 'to the orders which I have transmitted to you,' or 'to which you were subject,' if I had received any save verbal orders."

With equal emphasis Grouchy states in another work, published ten years later, in 1829,[2] "The orders of Napoleon were, 'Put yourself in pursuit of the Prussians, complete their defeat in attacking them as soon as you shall join them, and never lose sight of them. I am going to reunite to the corps of Marshal Ney the troops I carry with me, to march upon the English, and to fight them if they will stand this side of the forest of Soignes; you will correspond with me by the paved road which leads to Quatre Bras.' I attest upon my honor that these were his own expressions, that I received no other instruction, that the injunction to outflank the right of the Prussian army was not given to me, and that I did not receive until the next day the order to go to Wavre. This was given on the 18th of June, at ten o'clock in the morning. . . . This letter and that dated from the field of battle of Waterloo, at one o'clock, [P. M.] are *the only ones*[3] that I received on the 17th and 18th. The order-book and the correspondence of the major-general [Soult, chief of staff] prove this. This [book] reports the hours at which the orders were given, and the names of the officers who carried them, and its details do not permit a suspicion of an omission any more than of a misstatement."

The terms of this verbal order are somewhat differently given by Grouchy in another place:[4] "Far from modifying his first orders, the emperor corroborated them in saying, 'Marshal, make your way to Namur, for it is on the Meuse that, according to all probability, the Prussians are retiring; it is therefore in this direction that you will find them, and in which you ought to march.'"

In these verbal orders not only is there not a single word about a possible intention on the part of the Prussians to

[1] This implied that Grouchy's movement was to be on this road, which, as I have said, runs from Quatre Bras to Namur.

[2] Fragments Historiques relatifs à la Campagne de 1815, et à la Bataille de Waterloo. Par le Général Grouchy. Lettre à Messieurs Méry et Barthélemy. Paris: Firmin Didot Frères. 1829. Pages 4, 5, and note.

[3] The italics are mine.

[4] Le Maréchal de Grouchy en 1815, page 21. Mémoires, vol. iv. p. 47.

unite with the English, but there is a distinct injunction to take a southeasterly course in pursuit of the Prussians, which would indicate that Napoleon had made up his mind that the Prussians had no thought whatever of effecting a junction with the English. To show that this was the only idea in Napoleon's mind was plainly the object of Grouchy's narrative, and of these repeated declarations.

But in spite of these persistent denials, there *was* a written order, dictated by Napoleon himself, and written, in the absence of Soult, by General Bertrand (which fact accounts for a copy of it not being found in the archives of Marshal Soult, the chief of staff), and received by Marshal Grouchy on the afternoon of the 17th. According to some authorities,[1] it first appeared in a biography of Marshal Grouchy by a M. Pascallet,[2] in 1842 (page 79). It is also cited[3] from a work entitled Relation Succincte de la Campagne de 1815, en Belgique, Pièces et Documents Officiels Inédits, Paris, Delanchy, 1843. At this time the marshal was still living. Nevertheless, it was not known to Siborne, who wrote in 1844, or to Van Loben Sels, who wrote in 1849; still less to the Count Gérard, who carried on his celebrated controversy with Grouchy in 1830. Charras, however, with his exhaustive research, discovered it, and published it in his History in 1858. It appears, also, in a small work published in 1864, some years after Grouchy's death, by one of his sons, the Marquis de Grouchy,[4] and it is repeated in the elaborate Memoirs[5] of the marshal, published by the marquis's son in 1874. There is therefore no question about its authenticity. I quote from these last-named works: —

"Finally, and as if to take away all doubt, Grouchy received about the same hour from the emperor the order written below: —

"Ligny, *June* 17, 1815.[6]

"March to Gembloux with Pajol's cavalry. . . . You will explore in the direction of Namur and Maestricht, and you will pursue the enemy; explore his march, and instruct me as to his movements, so that I can find out what he is intending to do. I am carrying my head-quarters to Quatre Bras, where the English still were this morning. Our communication will then be direct, by the paved road of Namur. If the enemy has evacuated Namur, write to the general commanding the second military division at Charlemont to cause Namur to be occupied by some battalions of the National Guard and some batteries of cannon which he will organize at Charlemont. He will give the command to some general officer.

"*It is important to find out what Blücher and Wellington are intending to do, and if they purpose to reunite their armies to cover Brussels and Liége in trying the fate of a battle.*[7] In all cases, keep constantly your two corps of infantry united in a league of ground,

[1] Napoléon à Waterloo. Paris: Dumaine. 1866. Page 199, note; page 238, section 4.

[2] Pascallet's work is a popular biography of Marshal Grouchy, and quite eulogistic of him. It is not unlikely that the old marshal sent him all his papers, and that among them he found this Bertrand letter, and, naturally enough, published it. After this, it was of course impossible to conceal it longer. The title of the book is Notice Biographique sur M. le Maréchal Marquis de Grouchy, Pair de France, avec des Eclaircissemens et des Détails Historiques sur la Campagne de 1815 dans le Midi de la France, et sur la Bataille de Waterloo. Par M. E. Pascallet, Fondateur et Rédacteur en chef de la Revue Générale Biographique, Politique, et Littéraire.

[3] Pajol, Général en Chef. Paris: Dumaine. 1874. Vol. iii. p. 215.

[4] Le Maréchal de Grouchy du 16 au 19 Juin, 1815. Avec Documents Historiques Inédits et Réfutation de M. Thiers. Par le Général de Division, Sénateur Marquis de Grouchy. Paris: Dentu. 1864. Page 26.

[5] Mémoires du Maréchal de Grouchy. Par le Marquis de Grouchy, Officier d'Etat Major. Paris: Dentu. 1874. Tome iv. p. 50.

[6] The hour is given as towards three o'clock, but this must be an error, as Napoleon was not at Ligny at that time, but at Quatre Bras. The hour is not given in Pascallet's text, nor in Delanchy's, and is, without doubt, an unauthorized interpolation.

[7] The italics are mine.

having several avenues of retreat, and post detachments of cavalry intermediate between us, in order to communicate with head-quarters.

"Dictated by the emperor in the absence of the chief of staff.

(Signed) The Grand Marshal,
BERTRAND."

It seems impossible that Marshal Grouchy should in 1819 have forgotten this dispatch. There is not, however, in the memoirs written by his son and grandson, a single word of explanation of the absolute denials by the marshal, which we have just read, of the existence of any such order.[1] However we may account for it, this order remained concealed or forgotten for nearly thirty years.

Let us examine its contents for a moment. Grouchy is at first ordered to Gembloux; he is next told to explore in the direction of Namur, the route which the emperor thought it very likely the Prussians would take, and to push the enemy if they are retreating on that road. It is then urged upon him that he must discover what they are proposing to do, and the text given by Charras[2] and by Pascallet,[3] which varies a little from that given in the Grouchy Memoirs, puts the alternative with even more clearness: "It is important to find out what the enemy is intending to do: *whether he is separating himself from the English*, or whether they are *intending still to unite* to cover Brussels and Liége in trying the fate of a *new* battle."[4]

Liége is coupled with Brussels in this connection simply as an alternative supposition: if Brussels was to be covered, the Prussians must unite with the English; if Liége was to be covered, the English must join the Prussians. This suggestion, therefore, does not in the least injure the point of the injunction, which is to prevent the union of the allied armies, if they are seeking to effect a union; otherwise, to push the Prussians as far to the east as he could.

Now, as the Prussians, if they were going to unite with the English at all, would be obliged to do so on the right of Napoleon's army, and as he had ordered his whole right wing, with plenty of cavalry, to find out what they were proposing to do, and had said *in so many words* that they might be intending to unite with the English to cover Brussels in trying the fate of another battle, the emperor, one would think, had a right to dismiss the subject from his mind. It is inexplicable to me how Colonel Chesney[5] can say, immediately after quoting the clause of which I am speaking, "Such was the tenor of this important letter, which serves to show two things only: that Napoleon was now uncertain of the line of Blücher's retreat, and that he judged Gembloux a good point to move Grouchy on, in any case." To my mind, while the letter undoubtedly shows these two things, it shows a third thing quite as clearly,

[1] No notice seems to have been taken by Chesney of this extraordinary circumstance. He was too much interested, apparently, in exposing the mistakes made by Napoleon (who was endeavoring at St. Helena to recollect almost alone and unassisted, the details of the campaign, and of course made mistakes) to turn his attention to the willful concealment by Grouchy of this most important paper.

[2] Histoire de la Campagne de 1815. Waterloo. Par le Lieutenant-Colonel Charras. Fifth edition. Leipzig. Vol. i. p. 241. The first edition of this valuable work was published in 1857 or 1858.

[3] Page 80.

[4] The order, as printed in Le Maréchal de Grouchy en 1815, page 27, and in the Mémoires du Maréchal Grouchy, page 51, does not contain the words in italics. They appear, however, in a citation from the order in an Allocution said to have been addressed by the marshal to his officers on the morning of the 19th. Le Maréchal de Grouchy en 1815, page 118; Mémoires, page 292. They are undoubtedly genuine. The italics are mine.

[5] Waterloo Lectures: A Study of the Campaign of 1815. By Colonel Charles C. Chesney, R. E., late Professor of Military Art and History in the Staff College. Third edition. London: Longmans, Green & Co. 1874. Page 152.

namely, that he foresaw the possibility of the junction of the allied armies, and warned Grouchy to prevent it.

That evening Grouchy got only as far as Gembloux. From that place he wrote to the emperor an important letter, dated ten P. M., in which he uses this language: —

"It appears, according to all the reports, that, arrived at Sauvenières, the Prussians divided into two columns: one has taken the road to *Wavre*, in passing by Sart-à-Walhain; the other column seems to be directed on *Perwez*.[1]

"One can perhaps infer from this that a portion is going to join Wellington, and that the centre, which is the army of Blücher, is retiring on Liége; another column, with artillery, having retreated on Namur, General Exelmans has the order to push this evening six squadrons on Sart-à-Walhain, and three squadrons on Perwez.

"*According to their report, if the mass of the Prussians retires on Wavre, I shall follow it in that direction, in order that they may not be able to gain Brussels, and to separate them from Wellington.*

"*If, on the contrary, my information proves that the principal force of the Prussians has marched on Perwez, I shall direct myself by that city in pursuit of the enemy.*"[2]

This dispatch first appeared in Count Gérard's Dernières Observations,[3] published in 1830, and is a most important one. The *mass* of the Prussians, says Grouchy, are retiring in *one of two* directions, and I shall soon know in *which*. They are going either *east*, by way of *Perwez*, *separating* themselves from the English, or *north*, by way of *Wavre*, *towards* the English. If the latter, I shall follow them in that direction, so that they may not gain Brussels, and to separate them from Wellington. If, on the other hand, they have gone to Perwez, I shall pursue them by that city. If this dispatch was the one actually sent by Grouchy to the emperor, what wonder if the latter[4] thought that Grouchy had thoroughly comprehended his instructions, contained in the Bertrand letter, to find out whether the Prussians were going to separate from the English, or to unite with them and fight another battle for the defense of Brussels!

But the Grouchy Memoirs, vol. iv. p. 58 (also the Maréchal de Grouchy en 1815, pages 37, 194), give a different reading: "If I learn by the reports, which I hope will come to me during the night, that strong masses of Prussians are going to Wavre, I shall follow them in this direction, and shall attack them as soon as I shall have joined them." And the sentence stating his intention of marching on Perwez, if he finds that the mass of the enemy have gone in that direction, is entirely omitted.

It seems to me altogether probable that this last version is a willful alteration of the correct text. Charras was one of the most accurate of writers; he gives the other text.[5] No one can suppose the Count Gérard to have falsified the text; he gives it differently from the Grouchys. In fact, no one[6] has followed the Grouchy text. It may appear harsh to say so, but the temptation to expunge from a dispatch of Marshal Grouchy's, written on the 17th, the expression of an intention of so manœuvring the next day, in case the bulk of the Prussians are going to Wavre, as to

[1] The italics are mine.

[2] The italics are mine.

[3] Dernières Observations sur les Opérations de l'Aile Droite de l'Armée Française à la Bataille de Waterloo, en Réponse à M. le Marquis de Grouchy. Par le Général Gérard, Député de la Dordogne. Paris. 1830. Page 15.

[4] Cf. Siborne, vol. i. pp. 298, 375, 381.

[5] Charras, vol. i. p. 244, 5th ed.

[6] Chesney, 3d ed., p. 153. Siborne's History of the War in France and Belgium in 1815, 2d ed., vol. i. p. 297, London, 1844. Napoléon à Waterloo, par un Ancien Officier de la Garde Impériale, Paris, 1866, pages 220, 243. Quinet, Histoire de la Campagne de 1815, Paris, 1862, page 430. De la Tour d'Auvergne, Waterloo: Etude de la Campagne de 1815, Paris, 1870, page 231.

separate them from Wellington seems to have been too strong to be resisted. Not that this intention of the marshal's was a wrong one; on the contrary, nothing could have been more correct, more clearly in accordance with the demands of the situation. Wellington was on the Brussels turnpike, followed by the emperor. If the mass of the Prussians had retired upon Wavre, it was plainly with the view of joining the duke; and in that case the one thing for Grouchy to do was to try to prevent them from carrying out this plan, — to follow them in the "direction" of *Wavre*, as distinguished from the "direction" of *Perwez*, and to manœuvre so as to separate them from Wellington. Nothing, we repeat, could possibly have been better than this. But Grouchy did not, the next day, even attempt this task.[1] Although he found out before daybreak that the mass of the Prussians had retreated on Wavre, he kept himself *outside* of them, so to speak, and not *between* them and the Brussels pike; and, instead of trying to separate them from Wellington, pushed them, by advancing on Wavre, nearer to the English army. This he did, he says in his justification, because his *only* orders were to pursue them and attack them as soon as he should have caught up with them. Hence, as we suspect, the alteration [2] of his dispatch: "I shall attack them as soon as I shall have caught up with them," instead of, "I shall try to separate them from Wellington."

But while this alteration of this dispatch might perhaps have served the purpose of preserving Grouchy's consistency if the Bertrand order had never been brought to light, it cannot do so now. For now that we know that the emperor did not (as Grouchy maintained for nearly thirty years) content himself with a mere verbal order to pursue the Prussians and attack them as soon as he should have found them, but did, besides, warn him in a written order that they might attempt to unite with the English in trying the fate of another battle to cover Brussels, the accepted text of Grouchy's report to the emperor fits in perfectly with the emperor's warning. If they are going to Wavre, Grouchy says, they are of course going to unite with the English, and I will try to prevent this junction.

This dispatch reached Napoleon about midnight, at his bivouac before the English army. Grouchy told the officer who carried it to bring back a reply. But such was the carelessness of the emperor and Soult [3] that none was returned. No reply was written till ten o'clock the next morning. Yet the emperor believed, was almost certain, that he was to fight the duke the next day. Why he did not order Grouchy to march at daybreak to join him by the bridge of Mousty, or at any rate to occupy that bridge and the defiles of the Lasne beyond it; or at least why he did not take the trouble to say in so many words to Grouchy that if the mass of the Prussians was at Wavre, he, Grouchy, must be at the earliest moment between Wavre and the main army under the emperor, and in close communication with him, cannot be explained. Perhaps he thought, as he had certainly good reason to think from the marshal's dispatches to him, that he would do this without further instructions; but the emperor's negligence in this regard cannot be defended. "It was a grievous fault, and grievously hath Cæsar answered it."

Grouchy, who was up all night getting in the reports of his cavalry and

[1] Cf. Siborne, vol. i. pp. 318, 319.

[2] I am not aware of this altered version appearing in print till the year 1864, which was some seventeen years after Grouchy's death, when it was inserted in Le Maréchal de Grouchy en 1815, page 37; see also page 194.

[3] It is probable that Soult was not well suited for the position of chief of staff. He had been for years the *commander of an army*, and had had a chief of staff of his own. He was certainly unable to supply the place of Berthier, who had been the emperor's chief of staff in all his campaigns, but had, unfortunately, left France with the king

finding out the whereabouts of the Prussians, wrote two other dispatches to the emperor, one at two A. M., and the other at three A. M.; but the former of these has been lost. The emperor states in his St. Helena narrative that in the first of these dispatches Grouchy said he was going to start from Gembloux at daybreak, and to march to Wavre.[1] Grouchy begins his three-o'clock dispatch by saying,[2] "All my reports and information confirm that the enemy is retiring on Brussels, there to concentrate, or to deliver battle after being united to Wellington." He goes on to say, "I go this moment to Sart-à-Walhain, whence I shall proceed to Corbaix and Wavre."

I leave to Charras[3] the task of pointing out the error which the marshal committed in moving by way of Sart-à-Walhain upon Wavre. He should, as Charras demonstrates, have marched at daybreak on Mousty,[4] there crossing the Dyle, and thus approaching the emperor, and moving towards Wavre or St. Lambert, as might be thought best. This opinion derives all the more force from the well-known conclusion of Charras that had Grouchy done all this, — "had he,"[5] on the 18th, "marched sooner and manœuvred as the circumstances and the rules of strategy indicated, the disaster of Waterloo would have been neither less sure nor less complete." Charras is therefore a better authority on the question of what Grouchy ought to have done than those (like Gérard, for instance) whose judgments may be biased by their regrets at what they consider might have been and was not *accomplished* by him.

Although the sun rises at Brussels on the 18th of June at twelve minutes before four A. M., Grouchy did not succeed in getting his two corps started till seven and eight o'clock respectively! By eleven o'clock the corps of Vandamme, which was in the advance, had passed Sart-à-Walhain, about four miles from Gembloux. Gérard's corps was approaching the village. No reconnaissances whatever appear to have been made on the left of the column. The marshal sent off another dispatch[6] to the emperor, dated eleven o'clock. He says that the first, second, and third corps of Blücher are marching in the direction of Brussels; that a corps coming from Liége (Bülow's) has effected a junction with those who have fought at Fleurus (Ligny); that "some of the Prussians whom I have before me are directing themselves towards the plain of the Chyse, situated near the road of Louvain, and at two and one half leagues from this city." "It would seem," he goes on to state, "that this is with the intention of concentrating there, or of fighting the troops which pursue them, or finally of reuniting with Wellington, a project announced by their officers, who, with their customary bravado, pretend that they only quitted the field of battle on the 16th with the view of effecting a junction with the English army on Brussels.

"This evening I shall be massed at Wavre, and shall thus find myself between Wellington, whom I presume to be in retreat before your majesty, and the Prussian army."

From the last part of this dispatch it looks as if Grouchy thought that the Prussians were concentrating at or near Louvain. One certainly cannot comprehend how else he can say that by taking position at Wavre he would be separating the Prussians from the English.

But in half an hour after this dispatch was written he heard the cannon of Waterloo. This of course exploded his

[1] But see Obs. sur la Camp. de 1815, pages 88, 89, where Grouchy doubts having written this in this dispatch.

[2] Le Maréchal de Grouchy en 1815, page 46. Grouchy Mémoires, vol. iv. p. 65.

[3] Charras, vol. ii. pp. 57 et seq., 5th ed.

[4] There was another bridge at Ottignies, about half a mile north of Mousty, which would have been available.

[5] Charras, vol. ii. p. 65, 5th ed.

[6] Le Maréchal de Grouchy en 1815, page 54. Grouchy Mémoires, vol. iv. p. 71.

belief that the English were *retreating* before the emperor, and no doubt also convinced him that the Prussians were not thinking of "the plain of the Chyse," but were, on the contrary, going to join the English from Wavre as fast as they could. Why, under these circumstances, he refused the counsel of Gérard, who urged him to march straight to the sound of the cannon, it is hard to conjecture. His son tells us[1] that his father did not find the advice so bad in itself, but the form employed to present it was objectionable. The fact was that Grouchy had had constant trouble with both Gérard and Vandamme; his report to the emperor is full of complaints against them for repeated acts of disobedience;[2] and I think it very possible that the advice of Gérard was proffered (as Grouchy himself says) in a form very offensive to his superior, and that this really did materially influence the latter in deciding against it.

As to the results of this movement had it been attempted, the authorities differ. Charras,[3] who thinks it should have been tried, says it would have done no good. Chesney,[4] however, admits that one, or perhaps two, of the Prussian corps might have been stopped by Grouchy. I have not the time to go into this subject, but I am inclined to think that if Grouchy had so marched at noon the battle of Waterloo would have been a drawn battle, with the chances for the next day largely in favor of the allies, with their superior numbers. To produce a favorable result for Napoleon, Grouchy should have marched in the direction of Wavre by way of Mousty the instant he was sure that the Prussians were not going east, but were going north to unite with the English; that is, at daybreak, at four A. M. If he had done this, he would have joined Napoleon by noon, the Prussians would have been checked at St. Lambert, and the emperor would have defeated the duke's army by three o'clock in the afternoon, in all probability.

We are now, I believe, in possession of all the material facts which could have influenced Marshal Grouchy in his movements upon Wavre on the 17th and 18th days of June, 1815. We have seen that he declared at first that the emperor did not, on the 17th, give him any written order; that his verbal instructions said not a word about the possibility of a junction of the Prussians with the Duke of Wellington, but indicated that the Prussians had retreated in the direction of Namur.

We have seen, however, that, finally, in the course of many years, his written order, the Bertrand letter, was made public, and that in that letter the emperor did clearly warn him of a possible reunion of the two armies with the intention of fighting another battle to cover Brussels (or Liége, as the case might be). We have seen that in his first dispatch, dated from Gembloux, written, as it were, in reply to this, he assured the emperor that if the mass of the Prussians was retreating east he should follow it by way of Perwez; but if it was falling back to Wavre, he should follow it in that direction, so as to prevent their gaining Brussels and to separate them from Wellington. We have seen that on the receipt of this the emperor carelessly, but perhaps naturally, seems to have considered that the marshal comprehended the situation, and sent him no more dispatches till the one dated ten in the morning of the battle, which did not reach him till after four P. M., and of which we are soon to speak; and that Grouchy, having found out before daybreak that the Prussians were retiring on Brussels, yet, instead of approaching the emperor, and trying to get between the Prussians and the

[1] Le Maréchal de Grouchy en 1815, page 59.

[2] Ibid., pages 84–87, 92.

[3] Charras, vol. ii. p. 66, 5th ed.

[4] Chesney, page 201, 3d ed., where he cites the opinions of Jomini, Clausewitz, Müffling, etc. Siborne, 2d ed., vol. i. pp. 320–323, gives a good statement of what Grouchy might have accomplished.

English, persisted, in spite of Gérard's advice, in marching on Wavre by exterior lines of operation, thereby putting the Prussian army between himself and the forces contending at Waterloo.

But Marshal Grouchy alleges that, after all, the emperor made exactly the same mistake that he did, if mistake it was. For in a dispatch dated the 18th, at ten A. M., and signed by Soult, *he is told to direct his movements on Wavre, where he ought to arrive as soon as possible.* In fact, Grouchy sets up this dispatch in his own defense, in his report [1] to the emperor. And though this dispatch was not received by him until four o'clock in the afternoon, which was of course too late to be of any use, he urges, and with great apparent force, that had he seen this dispatch at the moment it was penned he would not have been justified in doing anything else than what he actually did. Let us, however, hear the whole dispatch : [2] —

EN AVANT DE LA FERME DE CAILLOU, le 18 *Juin*, 1815, à dix heures du matin.

MONSIEUR LE MARÉCHAL, — The emperor has received your last report, dated from Gembloux.

You speak to his majesty of only two Prussian columns which have passed at Sauvenières and Sart-à-Walhain. Nevertheless, reports say that a third column, which was a pretty strong one, has passed by Gery and Gentinnes, directed on Wavre.

The emperor instructs me to tell you that at this moment his majesty is going to attack the English army, which has taken position at Waterloo, near the forest of Soignes. Thus his majesty desires that you will direct your movements on Wavre, in order to approach us, to put yourself in the sphere [*en rapport*] of our operations, and keep up your communications with us ; pushing before you those troops of the Prussian army which have taken this direction, and which may have stopped at Wavre, where you ought to arrive as soon as possible.

You will follow the enemy's columns, which are on your right, by some light troops, in order to observe their movements and pick up their stragglers. Instruct me immediately of your dispositions and of your march, as also of the news which you have of the enemy, and do not neglect to keep up your communications with us. The emperor desires to have news from you very often.

(Signed) The Marshal Duke of Dalmatia.

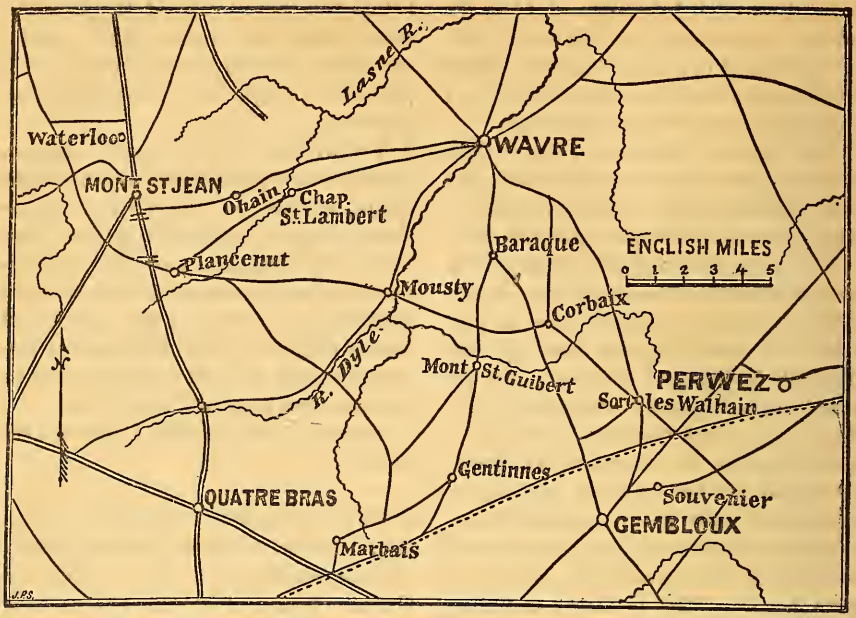
To understand this dispatch we must refer to those to which it is an answer, and particularly to that written by Grouchy from Gembloux, at ten o'clock the night before. In that he says, as will be remembered, " If the mass of the Prussians retires on *Wavre*, I shall follow it *in that direction*, in order that they may not be able to gain Brussels and to separate them from Wellington. If, on the contrary, my information proves that the principal force of the Prussians has marched on *Perwez*, I shall direct myself *by this city* in pursuit of the enemy."

Now Soult, having, doubtless, this letter before him when he wrote, simply says, Do not take *Perwez* direction ; take the *Wavre* direction, *so as* to approach us.[3] It not only did not follow from this that Grouchy was to march upon Wavre on the right bank of the Dyle, but, on the contrary, as he was to direct his movements on Wavre *in order* to approach the main army and to put himself " within the sphere of its operations," *it was necessary* for him to operate on the left bank of the river. It was certainly the leading thought of this

[1] Le Maréchal de Grouchy en 1815, page 64. Mémoires, vol. iv. p. 79.

[2] Le Maréchal de Grouchy en 1815, page 81; Mémoires, vol. iv. p. 319. See also Chesney, pages 206, 222, 3d ed. ; Kennedy's Battle of Waterloo, page 161.

[3] Cf. Siborne, vol. i. p. 380, note, 2d ed.



letter that Grouchy was to come within speaking distance of the main army. For him to quote this letter as justifying him in his exterior movement upon Wavre, on the right bank of the river, without any sort of communication with the emperor, is, we submit, to distort its meaning. If he could have read it in the light of the facts before him at the time it was written, it is apparent that he could not have obeyed it unless he should cross the Dyle at Mousty, communicate directly with the emperor, and operate against Wavre in communication with and conjunction with the main army, so as to be between them and the Prussians. Still, though I believe this to be the true interpretation, I cannot understand the omission in this dispatch of a clear and definite statement of the route to be pursued by Grouchy's column. What could have been easier than to have said, Cross the Dyle at once, get thus in communication with us, and then operate on our right flank? But the emperor and his chief of staff appear to have left all details to Grouchy to work out as well as he could. As in the Bertrand letter, so in this letter of Soult's, and more especially in the next letter, as we shall soon point out, the emperor seems to have been perfectly satisfied with merely indicating to his lieutenant the object to be attained, — whether it was the preventing of the junction of the Prussians and the English, or the abandoning of the Perwez direction and adoption of the Wavre direction, so as to approach the main army, — and to have left it entirely to Grouchy to take the proper line of operations to secure these objects. With a Masséna or a Davoust this method would have sufficed; with Grouchy it was a total failure.

At one o'clock in the afternoon of the 18th another and last dispatch was sent to Grouchy, on certain expressions in which, although it did not reach him until seven o'clock in the evening, he relies as showing that his course was conformed to the emperor's views at the moment. Let us, however, see the whole dispatch: [1] —

[1] Le Maréchal de Grouchy en 1815, page 67. Mémoires, vol. iv. p. 82.

18 Juin, une heure après midi.

Monsieur le Maréchal, — You have written to the emperor at three o'clock this morning that you would march on Sart-à-Walhain: your intention then is to go to Corbaix and Wavre. This movement is conformable to his majesty's arrangements which have been communicated to you. Nevertheless, the emperor orders me to tell you that you ought always to manœuvre in our direction, and to seek to come near to our army, in order that you may join us before any corps can put itself between us. I do not indicate to you the direction you should take; it is for you to see the place where we are, to govern yourself accordingly, and to connect our communications so as to be always prepared to fall upon any of the enemy's troops which may endeavor to annoy our right, and to destroy them.

At this moment the battle is in progress [1] on the line of Waterloo, in front of the forest of Soignes. The enemy's centre is at Mont St. Jean; manœuvre, therefore, to join our right.

(Signed) The Marshal Duke of Dalmatia.

P. S. A letter which has just been intercepted says that General Bülow is about to attack our right flank; we believe that we see this corps on the height of St. Lambert. So lose not an instant in drawing near us and joining us, in order to crush Bülow, whom you will take in the very act.

(Signed) The Marshal Duke of Dalmatia.

In this dispatch it is not difficult to cull out expressions which apparently favor the course taken by the marshal. But when it is said that the march on Corbaix and Wavre is conformable to the emperor's views, it is, we repeat, as contra-distinguished from a march to the eastward, in the direction of Namur or Perwez. It is, in fact, *because* the direction of Wavre will bring him near the main army that it is ordered. And when the emperor goes on to say that the marshal must manœuvre in his direction — to seek to come near to his army, *to join him*, even, before any corps of the enemy can get between them — the meaning of the first part of the dispatch becomes perfectly clear. And as if to warn Grouchy not to rely on any isolated expressions, the emperor proceeds to say that he is not giving him precise orders of march, but that he relies on him to find out where the main army is, to govern himself accordingly, to connect his communications with it, and to be prepared to fall on any of the enemy's troops which may seek to annoy or attack the right flank of the army.

This dispatch therefore confirms the truth of the remark we made before, that the emperor satisfied himself in his letters to Grouchy with general directions, and never went into details. He told him what he expected him to accomplish, and left him entire judge of the means of doing it. Thus, in his first dispatch, the Bertrand letter, while he tells him to explore thoroughly towards Namur, he tells him also that he must find out whether the Prussians intend to separate from the English, or to join them in trying the fate of another battle. Then, when he has received Grouchy's dispatches, showing his uncertainty as to where the Prussians had gone, but saying that if they went to Perwez he should follow them by that city, but that if they went to Wavre he should follow them in that direction, in order that they might not gain Brussels and to separate them from Wellington, the emperor in his second dispatch, tells Grouchy

[1] The text given in the above works is erroneous in one respect: it gives "la bataille est gagnée" for "la bataille est engagée." See Charras, vol. i. p. 287, 5th ed. Also, Seconde Déclaration du Général le Sénécal; Le Maréchal, etc., page 113. Also, Fragments Historiques relatifs à la Campagne de 1815 et à la Bataille de Waterloo. Par le Général Grouchy. Lettre à Messieurs Méry et Barthélemy. Paris. 1829. Page 14, note.

that he knows of one strong Prussian column having retreated on Wavre, and that he, Grouchy, must therefore take the Wavre direction, so as to come near him, and connect himself with his operations, following the enemy on his right with light troops only. Finally, having, doubtless, become somewhat uneasy at the fact that nothing was seen of the marshal by the cavalry [1] which he had sent out to the bridge of Mousty to look for him, and at the appearance of the Prussians on his right, he writes him his third and last dispatch, telling him that his Wavre movement is all right, but that he must operate so as to come near him and join him before any bodies of the enemy can attack him; adding, however, that he will not undertake to lay out his course for him.

Now we are quite willing to allow that this method of directing the operations of a detached wing of an army is open to the charge of leaving too much to the good sense and military skill of the general commanding that wing. We are quite ready to admit that orders should have been sent to Grouchy during the night of the 17th and 18th, directing him to make for the bridge of Mousty at daybreak. But we cannot agree with Chesney [2] "that Napoleon did not in the least foresee the flank march of the Prussians." The emperor certainly did foresee the possibility of this when he dictated the Bertrand dispatch, and he supposed that by warning Grouchy in a written order, when he sent him off, that the Prussians might undertake to unite with the English, he had taken ample precautions against the happening of this contingency. In a sense, the harsh expressions of Chesney and others about the utter state of ignorance in which the emperor was as to the strategy of his enemies, that he did not take at all into consideration the possibility of the march of the whole Prussian army from Wavre to join Wellington, and so on, are true. They are true so far as this: that Napoleon, having intrusted the whole duty of finding out about the Prussians — where they were, and whether they were going to unite with the English or not — to Grouchy, and having given him a competent force and plenty of cavalry and an express warning as to the danger of the union of their army with the English, had considered that he had done all that was needful; and undoubtedly he was taken by surprise when the blow came. But they are not true in the sense that Napoleon was throughout blind to the possibility of this junction of the allied armies, and took no measures to prevent it. If an experienced sea captain, on approaching a dangerous coast, intrusts the deck to one of his officers, to whom he gives a sufficient number of men, and whom he warns to beware of the dangers arising from the force of certain currents, and then goes below, he is undoubtedly taken by surprise when the ship runs ashore. In his berth, asleep, he certainly did not foresee the catastrophe. His principal, if not his only, fault was in his choice of the officer to whom he intrusted the deck. As to his knowledge of the perils of that part of the voyage, that cannot be questioned.

So with Napoleon. His throwing the entire responsibility of taking care of the Prussians on Marshal Grouchy was his chief fault, for Grouchy was not able to sustain such a burden. Davoust, whom he might have had, and ought to have had, in Grouchy's place, would have successfully carried out his ideas. And while I fully admit the emperor's dila-

[1] Rapport du Colonel Marbot, 7me Hussards; Napoléon à Waterloo, page 344. See also Siborne, 2d ed., vol. i. p. 317.

[2] Chesney, page 207, 3d ed. See also Kennedy's Battle of Waterloo, page 161. But General Shaw-Kennedy considered this subject only incidentally; his book is mainly concerned with the battle itself, of which it is the best narrative ever written; and as he played a prominent part in the action it is specially valuable and interesting.

toriness on the morning of the 17th, by which the concentration of the Prussian army at Wavre was assured, which in fact made it impossible for Grouchy, or for Davoust even, to prevent this concentration; and while I also fully admit the negligence of the emperor in leaving Grouchy so long without any instructions, except the warning of the possibly intended junction of the allied armies contained in the Bertrand letter, yet I cannot agree with those who, like Chesney, say that [1] "the notion that Grouchy is responsible for the Waterloo defeat must be dismissed, by those who choose to weigh the evidence, from the domain of authentic history to the limbo of national figments." The responsibility must be divided between the emperor and his lieutenant. Charging upon Napoleon, as we must, the faults above specified, it must yet not be forgotten that had Grouchy intelligently carried out the emperor's instructions contained in the Bertrand letter he might have been in a position to defeat, or at least to hinder, the junction of the allied armies. His information early led him to the correct opinion that the Prussians were going to Wavre, for the purpose of uniting with the English. He wrote the emperor on the night of the 17th that if he found this was so he should try to prevent this scheme from being carried out. Yet he never even reconnoitred on his left, to ascertain what they were doing; and he totally neglected the emperor's order to place detachments of cavalry between himself and the main army, so as to communicate directly and promptly with head-quarters. Instead of marching at break of day, he lost four hours by his inexcusable delay on the morning of the 18th. Instead of moving in the direction of Wavre by his left, and on the interior line by way of Mousty and on the left bank of the Dyle, so as to approach the main army, and to be able to hinder any attack by the Prussians upon it, he marched upon Wavre by the right bank of the river, so as to leave the Prussians between himself and the emperor. And even when the cannon of Waterloo convinced him that Wellington had halted to give battle, he persisted in his mistaken course, refusing, probably in part from the influence of petty personal feeling, the wise counsel of his subordinates to march to the field of battle.[2]

It is hardly to be questioned that, if Grouchy had moved at four o'clock in the morning by way of Mousty, and had put himself in communication with the main army, his forces would have stopped the Prussian advance, and allowed the emperor the use of his whole army against the duke's forces, which were inferior in numbers and composition. Instead of being obliged to detach 16,000 infantry against the Prussians, Napoleon could have used them against the English, and from what we know of the condition of Wellington's army in the latter part of the afternoon the result would have been a decided victory for Napoleon. If, on the other hand, Grouchy had, even as late as midday, changed his plan, and, following the advice of Gérard, had marched to join the emperor, he would certainly have averted the catastrophe, even if he had arrived too late to insure a victory for his side.

The literature of this campaign is voluminous. The fairest and fullest English work is that of Captain Siborne. He wrote in 1844. His remarks on this much-disputed subject are free from that *animus* against Napoleon which deforms the work of Chesney, in many respects so admirable. But Chesney,

[1] Chesney, page 207, 3d ed.

[2] And what can be said of the concealment for nearly thirty years of the order written by General Bertrand? What excuse can be made for the repeated and flat denials of the existence of any such written order? None, save that that order contained an express warning of the possibility of the junction of the Prussians with the English, which Grouchy did nothing whatever to hinder.

Hooper, Kennedy, Charras, and Quinet all wrote during the second French empire, and with the intention of "exploding the *Napoleonic legend*." They were biased by the relation of their subject to the politics of the day. You find them now declaring, as Chesney substantially does, that Grouchy did all that he ought to have done; or else, like Charras, that if he had done all that he ought to have done he could not have affected the result. But in vain will you look for such a temperate and sound criticism as that which Siborne [1] passes on Grouchy's conduct.

In most of the French narratives which defend Napoleon's course we also find unmistakable bias. In the brilliant but very untrustworthy history of the campaign by Thiers, in the quite elaborate and valuable work of the Prince de la Tour d'Auvergne, there is much that must be wholly rejected: the former work is not to be depended on for its facts; the latter draws many unwarranted conclusions. A work which has escaped public notice in great measure, entitled Souvenirs Militaires, Napoléon à Waterloo,[2] by an old officer of the Imperial Guard, though rather prolix, is a very sound and valuable discussion of the whole campaign, and is well worth a careful study.

I trust that I have not unnecessarily reviewed this famous controversy. It possesses a constant interest for all students of history. Apart from the dramatic incidents of the catastrophe, the utter defeat in a pitched battle of a captain so wonderfully able and experienced as Napoleon was must in itself always demand some explanation. I have simply endeavored to bring some facts, hitherto not generally known, to light, and to put the responsibility for the defeat where it belongs.

John C. Ropes.

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